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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0658

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000702

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: RIAD SEIF DETAILS RECENT SECURITY SERVICE
INTERROGATIONS

REF: A) DAMASCUS 00672B) DAMASCUS 00394

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Leading opposition figure Riad Seif discussed his recent problems with security services, which have focused their energies and threats towards Seif's February 5 interview in an-Nahar newspaper. Seif also related that he received his first official invitation, via intermediary, from former Vice President Abdulhalim al-Khaddam and Muslim Brotherhood chief Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni to join in a coalition with outside forces, an offer which Seif has rejected. Seif noted that he plans for a momentary "ceasefire", during which he will seek medical treatment either in France or domestically.

¶2. (C) SEIF DETAILS MULTIPLE MEETINGS WITH GENERAL INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE (GID) CHIEFS: Opposition figure Riad Seif told Poloff February 20 that he has been summoned multiple times over the last week to the offices of the General Intelligence Directorate. During his meeting with GID head Ali Mamluk on February 14, Mamluk warned Seif not to meet with the visiting United Nations Human Rights Committee delegation, which had been scheduled to meet with Seif and fellow ex-Damascus Spring detainee Mamoun al-Homsi later in the week. As detailed in reftel A, Seif was taken February 15 to an unknown location for several hours of interrogation by agents of an unidentified security agency. On February 16, Seif returned again to meet with Mamluk, where he was held for seven and a half hours in a "comfortable setting" with newspaper and tea. According to Seif, the February 16 detention was a stall tactic to prevent Seif from meeting with the UN delegation. During the meeting, Mamluk repeated two of three conditions that the February 15 interrogators had demanded: do not speak with foreigners, particularly diplomats; do not hold interviews with the foreign media; and return on February 18 for more interrogations. (NOTE: Following his release on February 16, Seif held an interview with journalists from the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit.)

¶3. (C) INTIMIDATION TACTICS CONTINUE: Seif and his daughter discussed the continued presence of security officials in front of their respective homes and at Seif's office. Neighbors of both Seif and his daughter have been questioned and harassed by security agents. A security officer appeared at Seif's door at midnight on February 18, requesting that Seif accompany him to a meeting with Fuad Nassif Kheirbek, the director of GID State Security Internal Branch (Branch 251). Seif managed to postpone the meeting until 11 AM on February 19.

¶4. (C) GID'S EFFORTS FOCUS ON INTERVIEW WITH LEBANESE DAILY: Seif then discussed the events of February 19, when he was questioned for five hours by Kheirbek. According to

Seif, the discussions focused on Seif's February 5 interview with an-Nahar, an influential, anti-Syrian Lebanese newspaper, in which Seif laid out his political philosophies, his attitudes towards external Syrian opposition groups, and goals for the future. Kheirbek presented Seif with a typed list of 13 points taken from the interview which Kheirbek said could be used as a basis for prosecuting Seif (points are currently in translation and will be submitted septel). Kheirbek informed Seif that he had received an order "from above" that the interview was not acceptable: Seif must either officially apologize for the article in an-Nahar or go to prison. Kheirbek tried to go on the attack and induce fear in Seif; when that tactic didn't work, he changed to "I'm on your side; I'm just following orders."

15. (C) Seif then suggested that he give an interview in a Syrian state newspaper like al-Thawra or Tishreen, discussing the an-Nahar interview, an idea which Kheirbek liked. While recounting the story, Seif smiled, saying it showed how "stupid" Kheirbek is, because anyone who had not read the an-Nahar article would certainly read it after the state newspaper article was published. Kheirbek scheduled another meeting with Seif for 8 PM February 20, during which time Seif was to respond to the government's list of complaints about the an-Nahar interview. Seif told Poloff that he will stand by what he said to an-Nahar except for offering clarifications on two points, one about foreign intervention and another that used the word "rebellion."

16. (C) Seif later spent an additional two hours that night with a Kheirbek deputy, General Turki Alameddin, discussing more general topics like the need for dialogue, which Seif brushed off as impossible, given the SARG's recent actions against him. Alamedin encouraged Seif to change his language, moving from calls for "regime change" to "regime

reform", to which Seif retorted that the SARG must return the "natural right" of freedom of expression to its citizens. When Seif complained the threat made against his son, Jawad, as Seif was being taken away on February 15 (ref A), Alamedin replied that Seif should "start taking better care of his family."

17. (C) SEIF EXPLAINS POSITION ON KHADDAM, REFUSES KHADDAM OVERTURES: Seif also briefly discussed recent press statements by former Vice President Abdulhalim Khaddam. Seif made clear that there is no love lost between him and Khaddam. Seif noted his long-time friendship with one of Khaddam's older brothers, who "hates Abdulhalim for his arrogance." Seif noted that Khaddam seems to overestimate his influence over SARG institutions; his influence lies with the weak public sector, he said, but he has no influence in the army and secret services.

18. (C) Seif briefly excused himself for another meeting in a separate room. He returned, reporting that filmmaker Nabil Melham had brought him a message from Khaddam and Muslim Brotherhood head Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni, inviting him to join a coalition of outside forces with another 12-13 unidentified individuals. Seif made clear that he had rejected this overture, saying that he did not want to enter any coalition as an individual, preferring instead to wait until he had formed some type of political organization-- or party-- which could continue its work should anything happen to him: "I don't want to be a one man show-- there are enough of those already."

19. (C) As far as Seif is concerned, the an-Nahar interview is not the real problem, but it has provided the SARG with an "entry point" to attack him. He noted that in the interrogations, his SARG interlocutors have not spoken directly about his plans to start a political party. He noted that the SARG seems to want to push him back into business, complimenting his business acumen-- and implicitly offering him the opportunity to "enjoy corruption."

110. (C) PLANS FOR A TEMPORARY "CEASEFIRE": As to his plans

for the near future, Seif told Poloff that he is planning a momentary "ceasefire", citing upcoming medical treatment. He would like to seek medical care for his heart condition in Paris, where his brother is a doctor, but has been informally told that there is a travel ban in place, barring him from leaving the country. He has been told that the SARG is particularly nervous that he might try to meet Khaddam while in Paris. Should he be unable to travel, he will be treated in Syria. However, at least one of Seif's projects seems to have fallen victim to SARG pressure, as Seif will delay his plans to start an anti-corruption institute (reftel B) "given the current pressure."

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